

## **Appendix N**

### **A THEORETICAL PROFILE OF SEUNG HUI CHO: From the Perspective of a Forensic Behavioral Scientist**

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When a shocking and horrendous crime has been committed an immediate response is, “Why?” It is human nature to seek an answer to that question, some feasible explanation for the motivation behind the crime. We will never know for certain what motivated Seung Hui Cho to go on a murderous rampage on April 16, 2007. But professionals experienced in the study of multiple victim murderers have noted some patterns of personality and behavior that are pertinent here. As a result of 33 years of experience in the analysis of crimes of violence, including the study of violent fantasies, I have developed the following theory about what drove Cho to do what he did. I begin with a general observation.

Most assassinations in the United States are not politically motivated. Instead they are often the work of inadequate persons who do not see any kind of meaningful life for them ahead. As a consequence of any of several types of mental disorders, they have come to the realization that they will never become important persons, such as significant contributors to their society and therefore, memorable persons in history. Some feel so poorly about themselves they do not believe they can even cope with the ordinary responsibilities of life. They feel powerless over their destinies and are helpless victims of their unfulfilled needs. They begin to build a fantasy where they can be achievers and persons who can change the course of history not in a beneficial way, but perhaps as an outcast. There is something significant they can do.

These killers target a particular person or persons. They can do away with one of those very people who are functioning well, coping with life’s stresses and requirements all the while achieving success. They can kill one of those people who have risen to a position of accomplishment, influence and prominence. Then they will be forever recognized as the person who shot the president, the movie star, or the famous athlete. They begin to plan the event. They read books and magazines about assassinations of the past. Like John W. Hinkley, Jr., they have their photograph taken in front of Ford’s Theatre and the White House. They write of their plan in essays and journals. They want to make sure that history properly records their most significant event. And if they are killed in the assassination effort it will be worth it. It will be a sacrifice. They can go down in history as a great assassin.

Their act will thus be two-fold: they will have a place in history as a major player (on the world scene) if the victim is important enough, and they will be killing that which they can not have for their own by virtue of ability, talent and achievement.

Similarly, some multiple victim killers act out of a distorted sense of unfairness and disappointment stemming from their own actual inadequacies and unsatisfied needs

for attention, adulation, power and control. Perhaps, such was the case of Seung Hui Cho.

If one examines the life of Cho along the five dimensions of human growth and development, his inadequacies become apparent. Physically Cho was average to below average. He was frail and sick as an infant toddler. Even the autopsy report remarked about his lack of muscle for the body of a 23-year-old male. Emotionally, his growth was stunted as a result of his “selective mutism”. Spiritually, he showed little interest and dropped out of his church before experiencing a growth in faith. Socially, he could not function at all. He was virtually devoid of social skills due to his extreme social anxiety disorder. Intellectually, which was his strongest attribute, he was average to above average in his academic pursuits but even these afforded him little or no consistent or positive sense of achievement based on the feedback from his peers or others.

Cho lived a life of quiet solitude, extreme quiet and solitude. For all of his 23 years of life the most frequent observation made by anyone about him was that Seung Hui Cho had absolutely no social life. During all of his school years he had no real friends. He had no interest in being with others. In fact, he shied away from other people and seemed to prefer his own company to the company of others. His few attempts to reach out to females at college were inappropriate and frightened them.

Cho was quiet and uncommunicative even in his own family. This led his parents to repeatedly discuss this abnormal characteristic with extended family members, church leaders, schoolteachers, counselors and medical practitioners. It was all to no avail. It appeared this boy could not voluntarily participate in the social arena under any circumstances, regardless of any advice, threats or rewards. Not even the medication he took for a year or the several years of therapy seemed to correct this serious handicap.

As a result of this condition of solitude, he grew into a joyless, socially invisible loner. But this condition in no way masked his desire to be somebody. He did well in school in spite of his lack of interaction. He was intelligent and worked hard to complete his assignments so that he could convince his teachers that he had a good grasp of the subject matter presented, even though he was orally mute. He simply did it all alone and with as little oral communication as was absolutely necessary. There are many problems that accompany such a lifestyle. One of the big problems with being a loner is that one does not get helpful reality checks from people who can challenge disordered thinking. Once a loner cuts off outsiders he automatically takes himself out of the game where he could grow, with help, out of his inadequacies. He inadvertently condemns himself to ongoing inadequacy and compensatory fantasies.

It was in his second and third year of college that he began to find what he thought would be his niche, his special talent that would set him apart from the sea of other students at the university. He would become a great writer. He changed his major from computer technology to English. He began to write in earnest banging out composition after composition on his computer keyboard. He began seriously to believe that his original material and unique style were very good. He sent a book proposal to a pub-

lisher with great expectations. When it was returned stamped “rejected” he probably was devastated.

He internalized this rejection for months. His sister tried to console him and offered to edit his work, but he would not let her even see the document. He tried to impress his English professors with his writing assignments but only one or two saw any particular talent. In fact many of his professors as well as his fellow students reacted negatively to his stories that were often laden with horror and violence. Cho’s dream was slipping away because of people - people who could not see and appreciate his desperate need to be recognized as somebody of importance. Once again he could not function successfully in the real world of people and normal expectations. These rejections were devastating to him and he fantasized about getting revenge from a world he perceived as rejecting him, people who had not satisfied so many of his powerful needs. He felt this way despite the fact that many of his teachers, counselors, and family members had extended themselves to him out of a desire to help him succeed and be happy.

At the same time, he realized that his parents had made great sacrifices for him so that he could attend college. He never asked them for anything yet they always asked him if he needed anything. They paid for his tuition, books, and expenses, and tried to give him whatever money he needed despite their own lack of education and low level of employment and earning potential. Perhaps he resented the fact that his parents worked and sacrificed so much and obtained so little in return. Meanwhile he was constantly aware of his classmates taking from their affluent parents and squandering their money on luxuries and alcohol. He perceived that these students had no appreciation for hard work and sacrifice. He saw them as spoiled and wasteful. They drove their BMW’s, dressed in stylish clothes and consumed the best food and drink. They had parties where sex and alcohol were plentiful. These students whom he once secretly wished to join were now considered evil and his peers were conspicuously privileged. They were engaging in “debauchery” and they needed to be taught a lesson.

Cho began to fantasize about punishing the “haves” for their stupidity and insensitivity toward him and others like him – the “have nots”. He remembered how Eric and Dylan (in his fantasy he was on a first name basis with Harris and Klebold, the Columbine killers) had extracted their revenge while cheating society out of ever having the opportunity of arresting and punishing them by committing suicide at the end of their massacre.

His fantasies began to come out in his writings as he authored plays about violence and revenge. Gradually, he realized he could extract a measure of revenge against the evil all around him. He began to plan. Simply by signing his name, he easily got a credit card to begin to make his purchases. He began to purchase the instruments and munitions he would need. He knew that he would never have to pay for these purchases because he would be dead. Like Eric and Dylan, he would kill as many of them as possible and then commit suicide. But his plan would be even better than theirs. He would plan a killing that would go down in history as the greatest school massacre ever. He

would be remembered as the savior of the oppressed, the downtrodden, the poor, and the rejected.

There was pleasure in planning such a grand demonstration of “justice.” He began to write about his plan and the rationale for it. He videotaped himself as he performed his role and read from the script he had written. He began to feel a power he had never felt before, and a freedom from his burden of inadequacy. He experienced a freedom to express the fantasies long held in abeyance. Whatever inhibitions he may have had against committing such an act were easily slipping away. He rented a vehicle. He purchased his weapons and ammunition, and began to practice for the big day. The excitement mounted as he moved closer to the day of reckoning.

Graduation was only weeks away but for Cho it was not an occasion for joy. Rather it was a time of fear and dread. He had never held a job in his life, not even during summer vacations from school. He did not want to go to graduate school as his parents had urged. The educational institution did not appreciate him. He would soon be facing the job market as a mediocre English major whose ideas and compositions as a writer had been rejected, while all those around him were planning careers with enthusiasm and great expectations.

What would he ever do once he was out of the intellectual environment of college where his brain had at least some success? He would be turned out into the world of work, finances, responsibilities, and a family. What a frightening prospect. As graduation loomed ahead he felt even more inadequate. There was the probability of only more rejection ahead.

By this time Cho may have become submerged (immersed) into a state of self-pity and paranoia, and could not distinguish between constructive planning for the future and the need for destructive vengeance and retaliation. His thought processes were so distorted that he began arguing to himself that his evil plan was actually doing good. His destructive fantasy was now becoming an obsession. He had become a person driven by a need for vengeance and would now strike out against “injustice” and rejection. He would become the source of punishment, the avenger, against those he perceived as the insensitive hypocrites and cruel oppressors. He didn’t need specific targets. His mission was to destroy them all. In his distorted fantasy world, he himself had actually become that which he seemed to despise most. He had become the instrument for the destruction of human dignity and precious potential.